

# Welcome Aboard...

**1797**  
Construction of USS *Constitution* is completed at Edmund Hartt's Shipyard in Boston. The frigate is launched as one of the first six ships of the new United States Navy.

**1803-1805**  
USS *Constitution* serves as flag-ship during the Barbary Wars, defending American shipping interests in the Mediterranean Sea.

**1812**  
In a short and fierce battle during the War of 1812, USS *Constitution* defeats the British frigate HMS *Guerrriere* and earns the famous nickname "Old Ironsides"

**1830**  
Virtually forgotten and in dis-repair, USS *Constitution* is rumored to be scrapped until Oliver Wendell Holmes' poem "Old Ironsides" sparks public outcry.

**1897**  
After spending nearly 40 years away in largely administrative roles, USS *Constitution* is permanently returned to Boston.

**1931-1934**  
USS *Constitution* embarks on a three-year tour of America's East, Gulf and West Coasts.

**1997**  
Newly restored, the ship sails under its own sail power for the first time in 116 years.

**USS Constitution, known reverentially as "Old Ironsides," is the oldest commissioned warship afloat in the world.**



Launched October 21, 1797, from a shipyard just a stone's throw from her berth today, she was a marvel of warfare science and America's most advanced diplomatic machine.



A remarkably thick hull incorporating Live Oak, a substance unique to America at the time, contributed to "Old Ironsides" cumulative 33-0 battle record. The sweat, dedication and sacrifice of her U.S. Navy crew virtually ensured it.



Crewed, maintained and operated by the U.S. Navy to this day, *USS Constitution* stands as an active reminder of America's maritime heritage, its struggle to preserve its freedom, and national pride.



# Welcome to America's "Ship of State!"

This brochure designed by the USS Constitution Public Affairs Office and approved by the Commanding Officer, USS Constitution. All images by USS Constitution Public Affairs. Photos are public domain unless otherwise noted. 2007.



The ship's commanding officer maintained accommodations for business and comfort in the sizable captain's cabin.



The **helm** is the ship's primary steering mechanism. It is attached to the rudder through a series of ropes and pulleys.

The **capstan**, located on the spar and gun decks, is used to maneuver heavy objects like sails and anchors.



At 220 ft., the **mainmast** is one foot shorter than the nearby Bunker Hill Monument and holds the main course sail, as large as a regulation basketball court.

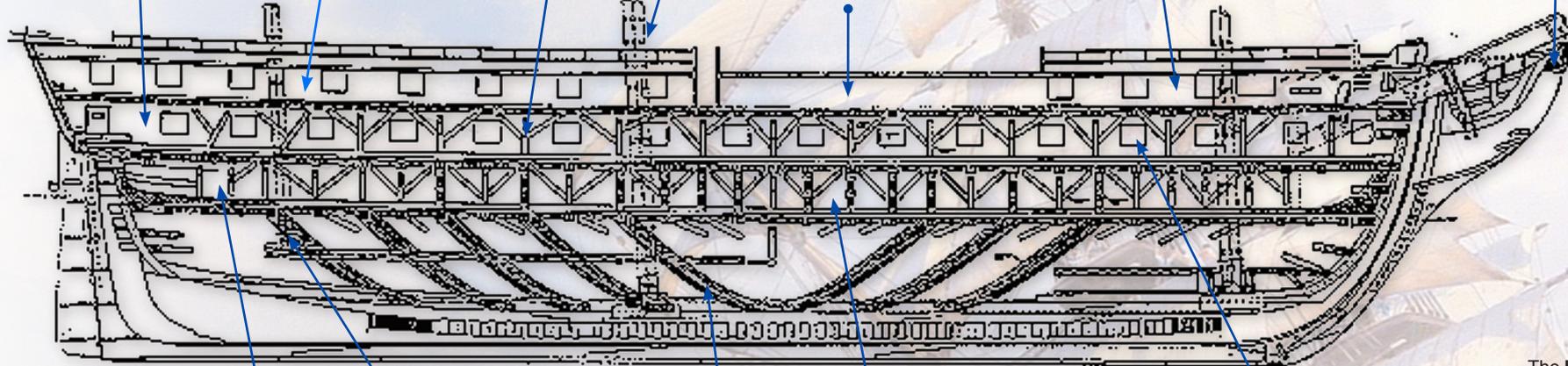
The **main hatch**, a large opening in the spar deck covered with wooden latticework, allowed supplies, fresh air and sunlight into the ship.



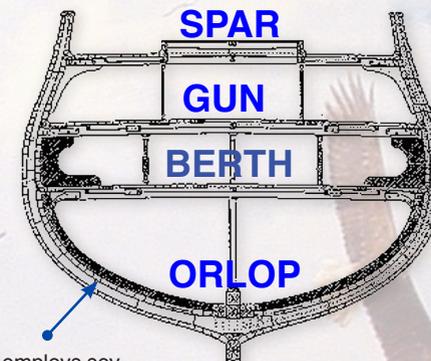
The **Charlie Noble** is the smokestack for the monstrous cambouse, or galley oven, used to cook meals for almost 500 men on the gun deck below.



USS Constitution displayed many **figureheads** (with figure) and **billeheads** (without figure) in her time, including Hercules, President Andrew Jackson, and even a dragon.



## Decks...



The **hull** employs several transformational elements, notably a white oak/live oak/white oak "sandwich" design that repelled gun shot and earned the ship its famous nickname. At points, the hull is 24 inches thick.

Made of white oak, the **keel** is original to *USS Constitution*, being laid at the ship's construction. It acts as the "backbone" on which the rest of the ship rests.

The **wardroom** is where the ship's officers lived. The accommodations were less comfortable than the captain's, but considerably more so than the rest of the crew.



The ship's surgeon performed his work in the **surgeon's cockpit**, a cramped space where he implemented crude tools and cruder methods.



Most of the ship's 500 men slept in four-hour shifts in **hammocks** that packed the berth deck.



The **diagonal riders** were technological innovations incorporated into *USS Constitution's* design. Massive lengths of wood transfer the ship's weight evenly along the keel to prevent it from "hogging" (warping).

The **long guns** weighed 5,600 pounds and could hurl a 24-pound solid iron shot nearly a mile effectively. It took a team of 9-14 men to operate the unwieldy guns.



# A History of the Ship...

After the Revolutionary War, our young nation's economy depended upon seaborne commerce with other nations. Merchants who traded in the Mediterranean found it increasingly difficult to conduct trade because of the attacks of the Barbary (North African) corsairs, who used belligerent tactics to destroy our ships and enslave our Sailors. At this time the United States had no Navy, and our merchant ships were left vulnerable to attack.

Recognizing the threat to our economy and the lives of American citizens, President George Washington argued for a Navy. Congress passed a bill on March 27, 1794, to establish the U.S. Navy that we know today.

*USS Constitution*, laid down that same year, was designed by Joshua Humphreys and Josiah Fox to be powerful enough to defeat any enemy about the same size and fast enough to outsail a stronger opponent.

Built at Edmond Hartt's shipyard in Boston, the wood from which she was constructed came from states ranging from Maine to Georgia. *USS Constitution* was commissioned, just three years after the laying of her keel and was launched October 21, 1797. The total cost was \$302,718.

## -The Barbary Wars-

For centuries, the Barbary States of Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli had levied tribute on even the most powerful European nations. If payment was refused, ships were captured and the crews dragged off to slavery. Before building our Navy, the U.S. paid more than a million dollars in presents and tribute to Algeria. The Bashaw of Tripoli, however, enraged that other nations were receiving more tribute than he, cut down the flagstaff at the American consulate on May 10, 1801, thus declaring war on the U.S.

*USS Constitution* was named as Commodore Edward Preble's flagship in the Mediterranean in 1803. Upon arrival, American forces blockaded the port of Tripoli and bombarded fortifications and gunboats.

After *USS Constitution* was sent for repairs and to recruit more crewmembers in Lisbon, she returned to the blockade. On June 3, 1805, a peace treaty was drawn up in her cabin by which tribute to Tripoli ceased and the American captives were released.

## - War of 1812 -

In 1812, Great Britain reigned supreme on the sea. Her warships would seize American ships and enslave, or "impress", our Sailors. A war with England, with our small navy of about 20 vessels against hundreds more of the Royal Navy, seemed an impossible task. Yet on June 18, 1812, America declared another war against Britain to preserve our hard-won freedom.

On August 19, southeast of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, a sail was sighted on the horizon and *USS Constitution* made for her with all sails set. It proved to be *HMS Guerriere*, the British 38-gun frigate that had pursued her a month earlier and was infamous for terrorizing American ships. When *USS Constitution* was still far astern, the British ship began firing. *USS Constitution* bore down upon the enemy in silence, the men stood patiently at their quarters, the gunners awaiting the order to fire. Not until the ships were nearly abreast did Captain Isaac Hull give the word, "Now, boys, pour into her!" A whole broadside struck *HMS Guerriere* and in 20 minutes her aft mast went over. *USS Constitution* passed ahead and sent a raking broadside crashing down the entire length of the enemy's decks, which cut away much of the rigging.

Cannon shot from *HMS Guerriere* made almost no impression upon the outside planking of *USS Constitution*, but fell into the sea, whereupon an unknown Sailor shouted, "Huzzah! Her sides are made of iron!" Thus *USS Constitution* gained the renowned title of "Old Ironsides."

As the ships separated, *HMS Guerriere's* fore and main mast fell. She was left a helpless hulk and surrendered. The British lost 78 killed and wounded while the Americans lost only 14 in a battle that lasted only 35 minutes, one of the shortest in history.

It was a dramatic victory for America and for *USS Constitution*. In half an hour, the United States "rose to the rank of a first-class power" and the country was fired with fresh confidence and courage.

On February 20, 1815, *USS Constitution* had her last great fight. The ship spotted two British ships off the island of Madeira. The frigate *Cyane* and the sloop *Levant* were smaller and lighter but their combined batteries were heavier than *USS*

*Constitution's*. Captain Charles Stewart's very skillful maneuvering prevented them from grouping up and overpowering him. Four hours later, both had surrendered.

## -Period of Transition-

In 1830, *USS Constitution* was unseaworthy and rumored to be condemned for scrapping. A poem by Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., entitled "Old Ironsides", aroused such popular feeling that Congress appropriated money for restoration in 1833.

From 1835 to 1855, *USS Constitution* made numerous voyages, the most important being her two year cruise around the world in 1844-45, under Captain John Percival, when she covered 52,279 miles in 495 days at sea. In Naples, Italy, in 1849, Pope Pius IX visited on board; he was the first pontiff to ever step on U.S. territory.

From 1853 to 1855, Old Ironsides patrolled the coast of Africa searching for illegal slave traders.

During the Civil War, the sailing frigate gave way to the progress of shipbuilding. For several years, "Old Ironsides" was used as a training ship at the U.S. Naval Academy. In 1878 she went on her last trip abroad, carrying American exhibits to the Universal Exposition at Paris, before returning to the Academy. Her long active career at sea closed in December 1881 when she became a Navy receiving (barracks) ship in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

## -Into the 20th Century -

In 1897, "Old Ironsides" was rediscovered by John "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald, a Massachusetts state senator and grandfather of future president John F. Kennedy. He spearheaded action to bring *USS Constitution* back to Boston, the ship's birthplace.

In the late 1920's, "Old Ironsides" went through a major restoration period. Funds for the restoration were generously donated by the people of America, much of it raised in a "pennies campaign" by school children across the nation. The remaining balance necessary was appropriated by Congress.

From 1931 to 1934, *USS Constitution* toured the East, West and Gulf Coasts, transiting the Panama Canal enroute. The voyage began in Boston on July 2 and covered more than 22,000 miles and 75 cities. "Old Ironsides" returned to the Boston Navy Yard on May 7, 1934, after having over six million visitors.

In October 1997, during the ship's 200th birthday, *USS Constitution* sailed for the first time in over a century, thrilling millions of patriotic Americans and proving once again that she is truly America's Ship of State. The ship carries out her modern day mission as the Navy's ambassador to the public and is a representative of the thousands of Sailors and Marines that serve our country proudly.

## The Ship at a Glance...

### Armament:

32 "24-pounder" Long Guns  
Crew: 6-14  
Range: 1200 yards  
Weight: 5,600 lbs.

20 "32-pounder" Carronades  
Crew: 4-9  
Range: 400 yards  
Weight: 2,200 lbs.

2 24-pound Bow Chasers

### Ship's Stats:

Speed: 13+ knots  
Sail Area: 42,710 square ft.  
Foremast Height: 198 ft.  
Mainmast Height: 220 ft.  
Mizzenmast Height: 172 ft, 6 in.  
Displacement: 2,200 tons  
Length: 204 ft

### Crew Composition:

(1812 era):  
450-500, including:  
55 Marines  
30 Boys  
20-30 officers & midshipmen  
(Today):  
50-80 active duty U.S Navy Sailors

## Visiting Us...

*USS Constitution* is open for public visitation year-round and can be found via internet mapping sites at  
**Charlestown Navy Yard**  
**1 Constitution Rd.**  
**Charlestown, MA, 02129**

For directions, visitor hours, and more, visit our website at [www.oldironsides.com](http://www.oldironsides.com)  
All visitors to the ship are required to go through a security screening process to ensure the safety of the ship, its guests and crew.

# America's Ship of State USS CONSTITUTION "Old Ironsides"



Charlestown Navy Yard  
Charlestown, Massachusetts  
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